HOMOSEXUALITY

our story too

lesbians
&
gay men
in the
bible

READING THE BIBLE WITH "NEW EYES"

Most modern gay men and lesbians are either afraid of the Bible or unfamiliar with its content, thinking that the Bible has only bad news for them. While it is true that the Bible was written in the context of patriarchal, heterosexist cultures, the message and story of God's unconditional love in Christ can be the "power of salvation" for gays and lesbians as well as for heterosexuals.

A bold, proactive reading of the Bible offers new life for lesbians, gay men, and their families and friends. Consensus is growing among respected scholars of Scripture that the Bible does not condemn such relationships.[1] Contemporary gay and lesbian Christians have focused on proving that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. It is time to move beyond defending this position. It is not enough for the Bible simply not to condemn homosexuality. Gays and lesbians must be able to say, "Yes, it is our story, too!"

Opening Doors of Ancient Closets

Liberation theology and feminist biblical critique have shown that the Bible, in order to empower all people, must be read with new eyes from the vantage point of oppressed peoples. When we read the Biblical stories through today's experience, they come alive with new relevance. What if we just assume that lesbian and gay people were always in the Bible? Their historical counterparts followed Moses and Miriam in the Exodus, and walked with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee! Lesbians and gay men are everywhere, and always have been, even when silent and closeted about their sexuality.

It is time to boldly liberate some Biblical gay, lesbian, or bisexual characters and stories from ancient closets. Centuries of silence in Biblical commentaries and reference books must now be broken by a passionate search for Biblical truth about sexuality. Does the Bible include references to, or stories about, gays and lesbians consistent with what historians and anthropologists know about sexuality during Biblical times? The answer is, "Yes!" Some stories are incontrovertible. Others are compellingly gay and lesbian. And, there are other stories curiously suggestive of same-sex relationships. All of these can empower lesbians and gay men to joyfully embrace the Bible.

A LESBIAN AND GAY "NATION"

The book of Acts is an account of the early Church as it attempts to preach and live an "unhindered gospel" (Acts 28:31). Today, there is a great, global awakening of gay and lesbian communities, who still need access to an "unhindered gospel."

Two crucial stories are central to such a gospel: Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10) and Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). Both have their roots in the prophecies of Isaiah 56. Isaiah proclaims a future day when Gentiles and eunuchs will be included among the people of God, and their sacrifices will be "acceptable." The Greek translation of the Hebrew word for "acceptable" in Isaiah 56:7 also appears in Acts 10:35.

An Unhindered Inclusive Gospel

In the story of Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius (a Gentile), Peter is given a divine revelation from God: ". . . God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God." (Acts 10:34–35)

The word "nation" is actually the Greek word *ethnos* from which we derive our word "ethnic." The term refers to a race, culture or people. Thus Peter learns that among every race, culture or people those who fear God and do what is right are eligible for baptism.

Is the gay and lesbian community just a political lobby for homosexual behavior, or is it an *ethnos*? Certainly, there are heterosexual people who engage in homosexual sex, and gay and lesbian people who may never have sex at all. Are gay and lesbian people a kind of behavior, or a kind of people for whom homoerotic attraction is one characteristic?

An *ethnos* could be defined by a common history, vocabulary, culture, institutions (schools, libraries, clubs, churches, synagogues, social organizations, businesses) heroes, political leaders, scholars, values, and the ability to recognize each other even when submerged in the dominant culture. If these constitute an *ethnos*, gay and lesbian people are included in the word "nation" used in Acts 10.

What evidence of gay and lesbian *ethnos* exists in the Bible? This is a complex detective story made more difficult by thousands of years of heterosexist bias in secular history and Biblical scholarship.

GOD BLESSES THE "BARREN ONES"

One place to begin is with the Biblical concepts of immortality. The Hebrew scriptures are not very clear about any consistent concept of life after death. The primary way that one would achieve immortality was through one's heirs.

The worst fate that could befall someone was to be "cut off" from one's people. This could happen by being exiled for certain crimes, by public execution, or by dying without leaving any children. Prosperity and having many children were viewed as dual signs of God's favor (Psalm 127:3–5; 128:3–6).

Better Than Sons and Daughters

In this context, female barrenness was considered a curse. A woman's worth was connected to her ability to give her husband children. The Bible is full of stories of women who desperately prayed to God to "open their wombs" (Psalm 113:9; Genesis 30:1; I Samuel 1:10).

Barrenness became a metaphor used by the prophets to describe Israel's pitiful condition when they felt abandoned or cursed by God. Isaiah 54 begins with a poignant recasting of this metaphor. Isaiah's prophetic message then revokes the curse of barrenness and Israel becomes a barren woman *with many children*. Two chapters later, Isaiah uses the term "dry tree" (a female image of barrenness) for eunuchs. It also associated the term "cut off" with eunuchs. The term "eunuch" in Isaiah 56 is possibly a generic term used to include men and women who do not have children.

The main reference in the law which may be the source of exclusion of eunuchs from the temple is Deuteronomy 23:1. Leviticus 21:17 says only those who are "unblemished can present themselves before God. . . . " This also excludes eunuchs who in ancient pagan religions were temple priests, and perhaps excludes children born of incestuous unions.

Ultimately, Isaiah proclaims an inclusive covenant which promises the eunuchs and barren women full participation in the blessings of God and a "name better than sons and daughters. . . an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

SOME PEOPLE ARE BORN "EUNUCHS"

Who were the eunuchs of Biblical times? The word, "eunuch," seems to refer to a male who has been castrated (often to render him "safe" for female royalty). However, there are references to eunuchs as court officials who were not necessarily physical eunuchs. Eunuchs referred to in Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel, as well as the New Testament, were not all castrated males. "Eunuch" is a more generic word that may well have included barren females, gay foreign court officials and magicians and priests, as well as castrated males. Castrated males were often functionally, if not constitutionally, homosexual.

Marriage is Not for Everyone

Jesus speaks about three kinds of eunuchs: "For there are eunuchs who have been so by birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can." (Matthew 19:12)

One might assume that eunuchs "made so by others" are those who have been castrated. Those who "made themselves eunuchs" are voluntary celibates. What of those, however, who were born eunuchs? Jesus makes it clear that heterosexual marriage is not the norm for everyone. This important comment by Jesus, which acknowledges lifestyles other than heterosexual marriage, applies to gays and lesbians.

Two stories of black eunuchs, both royal court officials, exemplify God's redemptive action. In Jeremiah 38, an Ethiopian eunuch saves the life of Jeremiah, an unmarried prophet. Jeremiah, in turn, brings a message of God to the king which describes how Jerusalem can be saved.

Another Ethiopian eunuch, in Acts 8, is baptized by the apostle Phillip. The eunuch is reading from Isaiah 53 (awfully close to Isaiah 54 and 56!) a passage of messianic prophecy which describes the destiny of the Suffering Servant who would be "cut off" from the land of the living. The eunuch got the message that those who have been "cut off" are to be included. Hence his question, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Phillip the apostle answers, "Nothing!"

JESUS CHOOSES A NEW "FAMILY"

Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, was "cut off" from his people in two ways: he was executed as a criminal and died without heirs. He was a functional, if not physical, eunuch. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ redefined eternal life, dissociating it from the necessity to produce children.

Once, when confronted by his biological mother and brothers, Jesus pointed to his disciples as a new family, saying: "For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31)

Jesus Lived an Alternate Lifestyle

Relationships of Jesus in the Gospels differ greatly from the contemporary so-called nuclear family.

Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha. What drew Jesus to this very non-traditional family group of a bachelor brother living with two spinster sisters? Two barren women and a eunuch are Jesus' adult family of choice. Are we to assume they were all celibate heterosexuals? What if Mary and Martha were not sisters but called each other "sister" as did most lesbian couples throughout recorded history?

John's gospel refers no less than eight times to the "one whom Jesus loved," also called the "beloved disciple." Scholars rarely explore that fact that Jesus obviously had a particularly close friendship with one man. Whether or not Jesus was gay, homophobia has silenced exploration of this relationship.

The Bible, in fact, knows almost nothing of the Post-Reformation ideal of monogamous, lifetime romantic heterosexual marriage. The Bible portrays marriage in terms of property and business transactions, polygamy, extended family, tribal groupings, Levirate marriage and other lifestyles. The anti-marriage bias in the New Testament and sex-negative emphasis of early theologians is well known by historians and students of human sexuality.

The new Christian community in Acts includes childless widows, former prostitutes, social outcasts, celibates, married people, eunuchs, blacks, Jews, and Gentiles. Those previously excluded were now fulfilling the promise of Isaiah 56: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."

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SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BIBLE

The stories of two prominent same-sex couples in the Scriptures provide gay men and lesbians with Biblical models of committed love in stressful circumstances.

The book of Ruth is a romantic novel but not about romance between Ruth and Boaz. Naomi is actually the central character, and Ruth is the "redeemer/hero." Boaz' relationship with Ruth, far from being romantic, is a matter of family duty and property. This story contains the most moving promise of relational fidelity between two persons in all of the Bible: "And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." (Ruth 1:16)

Although used in heterosexual marriage ceremonies for years, this is a vow between two women! When their husbands die in battle, Ruth makes this vow to Naomi, her mother-in-law. Ruth marries Boaz, a close relative, and redeems Naomi's place in her own family, also bearing a child for Naomi. Did Ruth and Naomi have a lesbian relationship? There's no way to know, but it is clear the two women had a lifelong, passionate, committed relationship celebrated in Scripture.

United in a Covenant of Love

Another story, that of David and Jonathan, occurs in a time when male warrior/lovers were common and considered noble. This tragic triangle of passion, jealousy and political intrigue between Saul, Jonathan and David, leads to one of the most direct expressions of same-sex love in the Bible: "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women." (II Samuel 1:26)

The author is clearly attuned to David's classic male beauty (I Samuel 16:12) in this story of love and loyalty marked by romance (I Samuel 18:1–5), secret meetings (I Samuel 20:1–23; 35–42), kissing and weeping (I Samuel 20:41), refusal to eat (I Samuel 28:32–34), and the explicit warrior/lover covenant which David keeps after Jonathan's death (I Samuel 20:12–17; 42). One cannot read this account without discerning that Jonathan was the love of David's life. Centuries of homophobic Biblical interpretations have kept them in the closet too long![2]

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Is that all there is? A few prophecies about barrenness and eunuchs and only two same-sex couples? There is more, and scholars need to explore the possibilities:

▼ Are the eunuchs in the Joseph story (Genesis 39–45) and the book of Esther also gay, residing in royal courts, and rescuing God's leaders?

▼ In the parable of the woman who has lost a coin (Luke 15), she had ten and lost one. Are gays and lesbians a lost coin joyfully rediscovered in our day? Gays and lesbians are now estimated to be ten percent of the population. Are they a tithe of humanity? Are they the leaven in the loaf of every culture?

▼ A centurion petitions Jesus for the healing of a servant who is dear to him (Luke 7). The Greek word in Matthew 8 is *pais* meaning "slave boy," which commonly described a homosexual relationship in those times. Why did Jesus praise the faith of the centurion but not condemn his lifestyle?

▼ Paul, the apostle, had no sympathy for heterosexuals who couldn't control their sexual desires. At the same time, his stormy relational life was centered around men, such as Timothy, Barnabas and Silas. Were his tirades against co-workers and churches, and his tireless missionary zeal partly a way to suppress his homosexuality?

▼ In the story of the rich young ruler (Mark 10), "Jesus looking upon him loved him." What is the connection of embodied spirituality and this "love" for a needy stranger? What studies have been done about the eight times Jesus was said to "love" someone? How was Jesus' particular "love" for individuals related to his sexuality?

▼ What of Lydia (Acts 16), the independent, Gentile businesswoman, seller of purple and the first European Christian? There is no mention of her husband, or children, yet she is noted to have led a women's group to whom Paul preached. Was Lydia a lesbian?

▼ The color purple is often used in connection with royalty, or suffering and passion, or transformation and magic. It is the color which Jesus wore to the cross. Does the color purple also have gay and lesbian connotations in the Bible and in Christian liturgical tradition?[3]

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

What difference does it make for gays and lesbians to dare see themselves in the Bible? It helps to know the people of the Bible as they were, not unrealistically assuming they were all heterosexual. In these references to gays and lesbians, there is no condemnation, and no cross-referencing to homophobic interpretations of the story of Sodom or Levitical law. It invites lesbian and gay communities to fearlessly read the Bible, to apply its healing and empowering message to their lives.

Footnotes

[1] Consultation of the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, on "Biblical Issues and Homosexuality," Unpublished papers, 1987. Six infamous passages in the Bible are used against gays and lesbians–all of which must be taken out of context when directed against them. A thorough, yet concise, commentary on these passages is provided in the pamphlet, *Homosexuality: Not a Sin, Not a Sickness*, by Donald Eastman, referenced below.

[2] This section, "Same-Sex Relationships," is indebted to Tom Horner's *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1978.

[3] This section, "Important Questions," is indebted to Judy Grahn's *Another Mother Tongue*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984.

Further Reading

The following sources are recommended for those wishing to more carefully study related issues:

Boyd, Malcolm and Nancy L. Wilson (1991). *Amazing Grace: Stories of Lesbian & Gay Faith*. Freedom: Crossing Press.

Eastman, Donald (1990). *Homosexuality: Not a Sin, Not a Sickness*. Los Angeles: Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

McNeill, John J. (1988). *The Church and the Homosexual*. Boston: Beacon Press. Orig. pub. 1976.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth (1988). *In Memory of Her*. New York: Crossroads Publishing Company.

Spong, John Shelby (1991). *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

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The Homosexual Experience: Rules, Roles and Relationships.

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10/5 : Who Do You Tell?
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11/9 : Gay and Grey
11/16: Fantasy, Fetishes and Fears
11/23: (No meeting - Holiday weekend)
11/30: Does Price/Pricess Perfect Really Exist?
12/7 : Breaking Up is Hard to Do - Why?
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Raps meet Friday evening, 7:30 to 9:30 (Early enough so that you can still go out afterwards, if you want to -- or can join a group of us for a little bar ministry.)
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All textbooks will be available through the church bookstore -- purchase limited to those attending the class (supplies are limited).

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Text: Homosexuality and the Bible; by Rev. Michael England, written for MCC - Washington, D.C.

Facilitators: Steve Wilkins
Robbie Hamilton

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If you attended Rosiland Rinker's workshop during General Conference, you were introduced to her ideas and thoughts about practical prayer and how to learn to be more open in your own prayer life.

For the purposes of this course you will be asked to keep a prayer journal and practice some of the prayer techniques of Rosiland Rinker.

Do you really feel you are communicating with God the way you want to?

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Can you draw closer to God and find the strength you so often need?

Can you share your joy with God?

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(You will need to have a notebook in which to record your personal journey)

Class meets Sunday morning, 9:15 - 10:15 in the Deacon's Classroom.

Informal class with individual prayer journal keeping (on your own), and sharing prayer concerns.

Text: Conversational Prayer: Talking With God by Rosiland Rinker

Facilitators: Phil Harry
Darlene Smith

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Ever wanted to know more about the Bible, but were afraid to open it because you really didn't understand what it was all about -- particularly the Old Testament?

Want to meet some of the most interesting and unbelievable characters ever written about -- yet who really lived and left their mark on our faith -- and on our history?

Want to meet the God of history -- who interacted personally then as God does now -- and discover how our understanding of God has changed over the centuries?

Want to explore your faith and the Scripture that makes that faith richer, fuller, deeper?

Attend our introduction to the Old Testament -- and let yourself be intrigued by history, by the sweep of the Old Testament across that history, and by a larger view of God and your faith -- deeply rooted in those Scriptures!

Class meets Tuesday evening, 7:30-9:30 in the Deacon's Classroom.

Formal class with group discussion. Some outside reading is suggested, and a variety of materials will be distributed.

Text: The Book of the Acts of God
By: Albright and Mann (paperback)

Instructor: Rev. Marge Ragona

Throw the Book at Them

JUST IN CASE you missed the December 1993 issue of the bi-monthly *Bible Review*, columnist Jacob Milgrom decreed that homosexuality isn't the "abomination" it's been cracked up to be, and that maybe it's time to stop throwing the Good Book at queers. Soon thereafter, all hell broke loose in Bibleland, in a brouhaha that *Bible Review* readers are still talking about. "Blasphemy!" shrieked many of the hard-liners, some of whom canceled their subscriptions. Milgrom's more reserved colleagues in religious academia, meanwhile, respectfully but pointedly dismissed him as having temporarily lost his marbles.

A rabbi, eminent biblical scholar, professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of six books and over 200 articles on the subject of the Hebrew Bible, Milgrom's words go far and wide in the world of those who revere and study the Bible. In "Does the Bible Prohibit Homosexuality?" Milgrom examined the verse most often quoted in attacks on homosexuality: "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination," Leviticus 18:22. He concluded that the prohibition was addressed only to Jewish men, and was not to be universally applied. "Non-Jews are affected only if they reside in the Holy Land," he wrote. The prohibition against queer sex, according to Milgrom, had less to do with an aversion to homosexuality and more to do with the "spilling of seed," since the discharge of semen by a man anywhere other than in a woman's vagina was thought to be a loss of life. "Note also that in the entire list of forbidden sexual unions, *there is no prohibition against lesbianism*," Milgrom emphasized. "Can it be that lesbianism did not exist in ancient times or that Scripture was unaware of its existence? Lesbians existed and flourished, as attested in an old (pre-Israelite) Babylonian text and in the work of the lesbian poet Sapphò (born c. 612 B.C.E., during the time of the First Temple) . . . But there is a fundamental difference between the homosexual acts of men and women. *In lesbianism there is no spilling of seed.* Thus life is not symbolically lost, and therefore lesbianism is not prohibited in the Bible."

WHEN IT COMES TO THE BIBLE, I'LL TAKE "FLAKY" WHEN IT'S ADVOCATING ON MY BEHALF.

Though I was ecstatic upon reading this, knowing that Milgrom's analysis would cause many a bigot's blood to boil, I had to admit that even this thoughtful revision seemed pretty flaky—almost as flaky as biblical rationalizations *against* homosexuality. Still, when it comes to the Bible, where little seems based on logic and reason, I'll take "flaky" when it's advocating on my behalf.

For Jewish gay men, who, Milgrom has decided, are the only ones the prohibition applies to, he had some advice: "As compensation for your loss of seed, adopt children . . . Adoption is certainly a possibility today. Lesbian couples have an additional advantage. Not only do they not violate biblical law, but through artificial insemination each can become the natural mother of her children."

I had to give Milgrom a call.

"Jewish males are almost an endangered species in the United States, so I could understand why the Biblical command to reproduce has resonance, but this solution I have put forth makes up for that, because it creates more Jews," he said, in an explanation that sounded even flakier on the telephone. "I think Jewish males in relationships should adopt children. If people want to act biblically, then God, in his mercy, I believe, will exonerate any loss of seed because it is being substituted by raising children . . . All I was out to do [by writing the column] was to stop the distortion of the Scripture. You've got to keep in mind that this periodical, which has a very wide circulation, is subscribed to by many in the Bible Belt. Most fundamentalists take Scripture literally and use Scripture to justify prejudice."

BIBLE REVIEW, which is not yet 10 years old, is a companion publication to the 20-year-old *Biblical Archaeology Review*. The combined circulation of both publications, according to *Bible Review* managing editor Steven Feldman, is a respectable 280,000—approximately the circulation of *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, and OUT combined—and it is growing rapidly. Readers run the gamut from detached, liberal biblical scholars, to fundamentalists who take the Bible as the literal word of God, to atheists and

Contributing writer Michelangelo Signorile is the author of Queer in America *(Anchor).*

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY EXUM

Said the aptly named Betty Harsh of Mansfield, Ohio: "Having been raised on a far

other non-believers. "There are many people who read *Bible Review* who really don't believe most of what appears in the magazine but read it to keep up with what the other side is saying," observes Feldman. "The Bible is one of the dominant books in our culture. Whether you agree with it or disagree with it, you have to deal with it."

Which is why some gay activists are foolish to think that they can simply will the Bible away by screaming "Stop the Church!" That approach, while it has brought a lot of attention to the vicious lies that are the stock-in-trade of some so-called religious leaders, hasn't stopped church hierarchies from hating homos, nor has it stopped them from enabling and encouraging much of society to treat us like garbage. Even an ardent non-believer like me has come to the conclusion that demanding a separation between church and state isn't enough; the churches' basic doctrines must be changed, with homophobia written out forever.

On the vanguard of that kind of change are those out-of-the-closet lesbians and gay men in established, antigay churches. Rather than criticizing people in groups like Dignity (the gay Catholic group), labeling them self-loathing freaks seeking acceptance from people who hate them, we should fully support them for being nasty thorns in the sides of some of our vilest enemies.

That's even more imperative now, since while we quibble and divide, the other side is uniting. What is new about *Bible Review*, what distinguishes it from other religious publications, is that it is a forum for discussion and study of the Hebrew Bible as well as the various translations of the Christian Bible. The magazine is read by the most orthodox of Jews, Catholics, and Protestants alike—groups that in the past were trying to stamp *each other* out, but now, for the first time, have a common publication. "It's the love of the Bible that brings them together," observes Milgrom. "You have a closing of ranks among religious people because all groups are faced with the same problems, some of them quite severe—the rank materialism on the increase and the assimilation into the 'me too' generation. So you have the forging of a common front. Among the orthodox in each of the groups you have common hostilities, and so the groups merge."

And in solidarity they fight a common enemy. Readers of all religious persuasions responded to Milgrom's column with a torrent of letters, none of which supported his conclusions.

"What kind of nation would be generated by such permissive liberal behavior?" asked the aptly named Betty Harsh of Mansfield, Ohio. "Having been raised on a farm I can assure you that even dumb animals do not practice such things." Harsh's opinion was representative of readers with an orthodox bent. Perhaps more disappointing, however, were the letters from "liberal" biblical scholars and academics whose homophobia is swathed in the cloth of intellectual rationality, rather than the ragged wrap of the fanatic.

"While I always find Jacob Milgrom's scholarship compelling and profoundly human and wise, his recent

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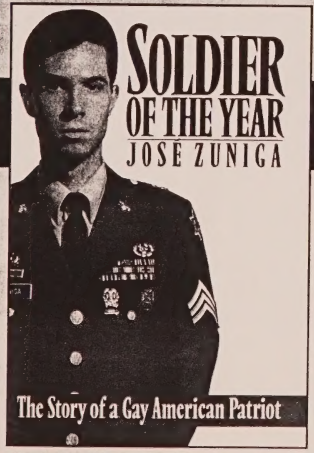

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HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE

BIBLE PASSAGES	PROBLEM AREA	WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS
Deuteronomy 23: 17,18 I Kings 14: 22-24 I Kings 15: 12 I Kings 22: 46 II Kings 23: 7	Usual translation is "whore" or "sodomite," sometimes "dog."	*Qadesh* (male), *qadeshah* (female) are both temple prostitutes and in totally heterosexual fertility rites; has nothing to do with homosexuality.
Genesis 19: 4-11 Judges 19: 22	Verb *yadha* means to know, 933 times nonsexually, 10 times heterosexually, never homosexually. The actual crime was to break the holy desert code of hospitality.	"Sodom and its daughters lived in pride, in plenty and in careless ease; they never lent a hand to the weak and wretched. Haughty they grew and committed detestable impieties before my face." (Ezekiel 16: 49-50)
Leviticus 18: 22 Leviticus 20:13-14	Canaanites used anal rape as a means of demoralizing male captives and slaves, thus reducing them to the status of women and chattel. This would be sexist thinking today.	Israel did not know or understand relational homosexuality as it is experienced today. They only knew that males being used by other males sexually did not fit their concept of being in God's image for Israelite men. Today, women are in God's image, as are all people.
I Corinthians 6:9 I Timothy 1: 10	*Malachoi*, *arsenokoitai* are translated as condemnation of homosexuals. They are not the two partners in a relationship. The Greeks had words for these; *erastes* and *eromanes,* neither of which are in the Bible.	*Malachoi* means soft (like fabric) or morally spineless. Those who were *malakos* could not be trusted to keep their word when worship of the emperor was demanded. *Arsenokoitai* was a sexual word; Christians were asked not to do it with their wives. Both had to do with those who would be too morally weak to be true to the early Christian church.
Romans I: 26-27	Again, no part of this relates to homosexuals. The "likewise" portion does not refer to lesbians, but to heterosexual women who used the *phalli.*	The "unnatural practices" refer to the practices of the mystery religions; including *phallus* worship, the use of carved *phalli* (like birds and fish), especially in worship, and to orgies in which, finally, to join with the God, the men castrated themselves.
Genesis 1	For those who argue that God created Adam and Eve, not "Adam and Steve," and that only heterosexual marriage is allowed.	God's statement that "it is not good for humans to be alone," is biblical reason for everyone, including gay people, to have a partner.

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a farm I can assure you that even dumb animals do not practice such things."

column . . . is, for me, uncharacteristic of his outstanding writing," wrote Alan J. Yuter, an assistant professor of Judaic Studies at Touro College in New York. "According to a literal reading of Scripture, homosexuality is a *to'erah*, usually rendered 'abomination' . . . Milgrom's attempt to ameliorate the plight of the homosexual is a reflex of his gentle humanity."

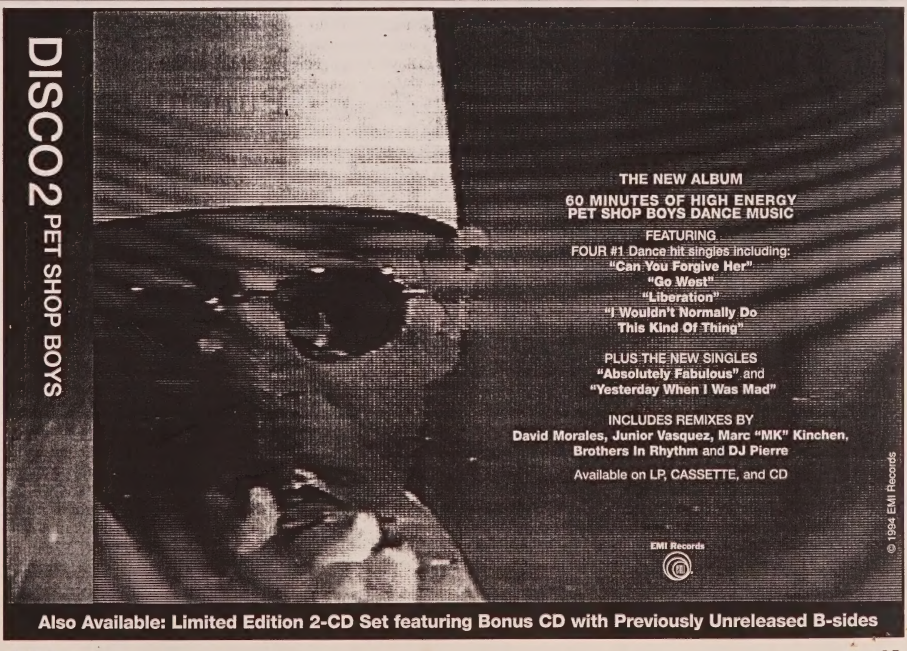
And here's where it really gets ugly. In addition to quoting verses from the Bible, the scholars often cited the works of gay historians, in essence using our own words against us. When Michael Anbar wrote, "Japanese history tells us that in the 17th century homosexuality, pedophilia and bisexuality were practiced by the *whole* Japanese male population . . . [but] disappeared later . . . when [a different regime] came to power," he footnoted an article from gay historian Martin Duberman's book *Hidden From History*. Anbar's conclusions, however, came from somewhere else: "It is clear to me, therefore, that homosexuality is a cultural phenomenon that may spread or shrink in a given culture depending on its *values* . . . Pedophilia and bestiality may then be in line for consideration as additional legitimate outlets for human sexual drives." Dressed up in lofty prose, this was nothing but classic, Grade A hatred.

But it didn't move Jacob Milgrom, who only became more resolute in his thinking. He not only responded to several of the letters against him, but he wrote a follow-up column—"How Not to Read the Bible"—in which he observed that the issue of homosexuality "obviously struck a nerve with many people" and warranted further discussion. He cited and analyzed several other verses in the Bible, introduced statistics about homosexuality put forth by Alfred C. Kinsey and other scientists, and, just like his opponents, referred to works by gay and lesbian authors to back up his opinions. In closing he offered a personal note that, although again flaky, and even skittish, nonetheless advocated in its own way for queers: "I am not for homosexuality, but I am for homosexuals. I grieve for their plight—their pariah status and their discrimination in the workplace and the military. But when the Bible is distorted to make God their enemy, I must speak out to set the record straight."

That was in line with what was perhaps the most telling thing Milgrom said during our phone conversation: "I'm friendly with many gay people. One of my former students was the rabbi of a homosexual congregation here in Berkeley."

The moral of this parable: As esoteric and even wacky as the goings-on at *Bible Review* seem, they represent a debate that needs to happen—in devoutly religious Biblical circles and far beyond. Jacob Milgrom's column was the first time that the topic of homosexuality has even been broached in *Bible Review*, and it's doubtful it will be the last. It happened because Milgrom had gay friends, because some gay people, rather than rejecting their religious faith, decided to stick with it and fight. They are activists in every sense of the word.

—MICHELANGELO SIGNORILE



HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE

Bible Passage	Problem Area	What the Bible really says
Deut. 23:17-18 I Kings 14:22-24 I Kings 15:12 I Kings 22:46 II Kings 23:7	Usual translation is "whore" or "sodomite," sometimes "dog."	Qadesh (m), qedeshah (f) are both temple prostitutes, and in totally heterosexual fertility rites; has nothing to do with homosexuality.
Gen. 19:4-11 Judges 19:22	Verb, yadha means to know, 933 times nonsexually, 10 times heterosexually, never homosexually. The actual crime was to break the holy desert code of hospitality.	"Sodom and its daughters lived in pride, in plenty, and in careless ease; they never lent a hand to the weak and wretched. Haughty they grew, and committed detestable impieties before my face." Ezek:16:49-50
Leviticus 18:22 Leviticus 20:13-14	Canaanites used anal rape as a means of demoralizing male captives/slaves, thus reducing them to status of women and chattel. This would be sexist thinking today.	Israel did not know or understand relational homosexuality as it is experienced today. They only knew that males being used sexually did not fit their concept of "being in God's image" for Israelite men. Today women are in God's image, as are all people.
I Cor. 6:9 I Tim 1:10	Malakoi, areseno-koitai are translated as condemnation of homosexuals. They are not the two partners in a relationship. The Greeks had a word for these; erastes and eromanes neither of which are in the Bible.	Malakoi means soft (fabric) or morally spineless. Those who were malakos could not be trusted keep their their word as Christians when worship of the emperor was demanded. Arseno-koitoi was a sexual word; Christians were asked not to do it with their wives. Both had to do with those who would be too morally weak to be true to the early Christian church.
Romans 1:26-27	Again, no part of this relates to homosexuals. The "likewise" portion does not refer to Lesbians but to heterosexual women who used the phalli.	The "unnatural practices" refer to the practices of the mystery religions. including phallus worship, the use of carved phalli (like birds and fish), especially in worship, and to orgies in which, finally, to join with the god, the men castrated themselves.
Genesis 2:18 woman given childbirth as punishment Gen 3:16 Rule of man over woman as punishment.	For those who argue that God created Adam and Eve, not "Adam and Steve."	God's statement that "It is not good for humans to be alone," is biblical reason for everyone, including gay people, to have a partner.

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He who gives his daughter in marriage does well, & he who does not give her in marriage does better!

HOMOSEXUALITY & THE CHURCH

The most beautiful word in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "whosoever." All of God's promises are intended for every human being. This includes gay men and lesbians. How tragic it is that the Christian Church has excluded and persecuted people who are homosexual!

We are all created with powerful needs for personal relationships. Our quality of life depends upon the love we share with others, whether family or friends, partners or peers. Yet, lesbians and gay men facing hostile attitudes in society often are denied access to healthy relationships. Jesus Christ calls us to find ultimate meaning in life through a personal relationship with our Creator. This important spiritual union can bring healing and strength to all of our human relationships.

Not a Sin, Not a Sickness

For many centuries, the Christian Church's attitude toward human sexuality was very negative: sex was for procreation, not for pleasure; women and slaves were considered property to be owned by males; and many expressions of heterosexuality, like homosexuality, were considered sinful. Such tradition often continues to influence churches today. Many teach that women should be subordinate to men, continue to permit forms of discrimination against peoples of color, and condemn homosexuals. They say that all homosexual acts are sinful, often referring to their interpretation of scripture.

Other churches today are influenced by a century of psychoanalytic thought promoted through a powerful minority in the field of medicine. They see homosexuality as some kind of sickness. Although this view has now been soundly discredited by the medical profession, some churches and clergy continue to be influenced by the idea. They say that homosexuals are "imperfect" and in need of "healing."

The good news is that, since 1968, when Metropolitan Community Church was founded, the emergence of a strong lesbian and gay community, and the conclusions of new scientific studies on homosexuality have forced the Christian Church to reexamine these issues. A growing number of biblical and theological scholars now recognize that Scripture does not condemn loving, responsible homosexual relationships. Therefore, gay men and lesbians should be accepted–just as they are–in Christian churches, and homosexual relationships should be celebrated and affirmed!

ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Bible is a collection of writings which span more than a thousand years recounting the history of God's relationship with the Hebrew and Christian people. It was written in several languages, embraces many literary forms, and reflects cultures very different from our own. These are important considerations for properly understanding the Bible in its context.

There are vast differences in doctrines between various Christian denominations, all of which use the same Bible. Such differences have led some Christians to claim that other Christians are not really Christians at all! Biblical interpretation and theology differ from church to church.

Biblical interpretation and theology also change from time to time. Approximately 150 years ago in the United States, some Christian teaching held that there was a two-fold moral order: black and white. Whites were thought to be superior to blacks, therefore blacks were to be subservient and slavery was an institution ordained by God. Clergy who supported such an abhorrent idea claimed the authority of the Bible. The conflict over slavery led to divisions which gave birth to some major Christian denominations. These same denominations, of course, do not support slavery today. Did the Bible change? No, their *interpretation* of the Bible did!

New Information Refutes Old Ideas

What influences lead us to new ways of understanding Scripture? New scientific information, social changes, and personal experience are perhaps the greatest forces for change in the way we interpret the Bible and develop our beliefs. Scientific awareness of homosexual orientation did not exist until the nineteenth century.

Most Christian churches, including Metropolitan Community Church, believe the Bible was inspired by God and provides a key source of authority for the Christian faith. Therefore, what the Bible teaches on any subject, including sexuality, is of great significance. The problem, however, is that sometimes the Bible says very little about some subjects; and popular attitudes about those matters are determined much more by other sources, which are then read into the biblical statements. This has been particularly true of homosexuality. But fortunately, recent scholarship refutes many previous assumptions and conclusions.

GENESIS 19:1–25

What was the sin of Sodom? Some "televangelists" carelessly proclaim that God destroyed the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of "homosexuality." Although some theologians have equated the sin of Sodom with homosexuality, a careful look at Scripture corrects such ignorance.

Announcing judgment on these cities in Genesis 18, God sends two angels to Sodom, where Abraham's nephew, Lot, persuades them to stay in his home. Genesis 19 records that "all the people from every quarter" surround Lot's house demanding the release of his visitors so "we might know them." The Hebrew word for "know" in this case, *yadha*, usually means "have thorough knowledge of." It could also express intent to examine the visitors' credentials, or on rare occasions the term implies sexual intercourse. If the latter was the author's intended meaning, it would have been a clear case of attempted gang rape.

Horrified at this gross violation of ancient hospitality rules, Lot attempts to protect the visitors by offering his two daughters to the angry crowd, a morally outrageous act by today's standards. The people of Sodom refuse, so the angels render them blind. Lot and his family are then rescued by the angels as the cities are destroyed.

Several observations are important. First, the judgment on these cities for their wickedness had been announced prior to the alleged homosexual incident. Second, *all* of Sodom's people participated in the assault on Lot's house; in no culture has more than a small minority of the population been homosexual. Third, Lot's offer to release his daughters suggests he knew his neighbors to have heterosexual interests. Fourth, if the issue was sexual, why did God spare Lot, who immediately commits incest with his daughters? Most importantly, why do all the other passages of Scripture referring to this account fail to raise the issue of homosexuality?

What was the Sin of Sodom?

Ezekiel 16:48–50 states it clearly: people of Sodom, like many people today, had abundance of material goods. But they failed to meet the needs of the poor, and they worshipped idols.

The sins of injustice and idolatry plague every generation. We stand under the same judgment if we create false gods or treat others with injustice.

I CORINTHIANS 6:9 & I TIMOTHY 1:10

Any consideration of New Testament statements on same-sex acts must carefully view the social context of the Greco-Roman culture in which Paul ministered. Prostitution and pederasty (sexual relationships of adult men with boys) were the most commonly known male same-sex acts.

In I Corinthians 6:9, Paul condemns those who are "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind," as translated in the King James version. Unfortunately, some newer translations are worse, rendering these words "homosexuals." Recent scholarship unmasks the homophobia behind such mistranslations. The first word–*malakos*, in the Greek text–which has been translated "effeminate" or "soft," most likely refers to someone who lacks discipline or moral control. The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament but never with reference to sexuality.

The second word, *arsenokoitai*, occurs once each in I Corinthians and I Timothy, but nowhere else in other literature of the period. It is derived from two Greek words, one meaning "males" and the other "beds," a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Other Greek words were commonly used to describe homosexual behavior but do not appear here. The larger context of I Corinthians 6 shows Paul extremely concerned with prostitution, so it is very possible he was referring to male prostitutes. But many experts now attempting to translate these words have reached a simple conclusion: their precise meaning is uncertain.

No Law Against Love

The rarity with which Paul discusses any form of same-sex behavior and the ambiguity in references attributed to him make it extremely unsound to conclude any sure position in the New Testament on homosexuality, especially in the context of loving, responsible relationships. Since any arguments must be made from silence, it is much more reliable to turn to great principles of the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles. *Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. Do not judge others, lest you be judged. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love . . . against such there is no law.*

One thing is abundantly clear, as Paul stated in Galatians 5:14: "the *whole* Law is fulfilled in one statement, *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*"

OTHER INSIGHTS

"The homosexuality the New Testament opposes is the pederasty of the Greco-Roman culture; the attitudes toward pederasty and, in part, the language used to oppose it are informed by the Jewish background."

Robin Scroggs, Professor of Biblical Theology
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

"One cannot be absolutely certain that the two key words in I Corinthians 6:9 are meant as references to male homosexual behavior."

Victor Paul Furnish, Professor of New Testament
Perkins School of Theology, Dallas

"The strongest New Testament argument against homosexual activity as intrinsically immoral has been derived traditionally from Romans 1:26, where this activity is indicated as *para physin*. The normal English translation for this has been 'against nature.' Two interpretations can be justified concerning what Paul meant by the phrase. It could refer to the individual pagan, who goes beyond his own sexual appetites in order to indulge in new sexual pleasures. The second possibility is that *physis* refers to the 'nature' of the chosen people who were forbidden by Levitical law to have homosexual relations."

John J. McNeill, Adjunct Professor of Psychology
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

"A close reading of Paul's discussion of homosexual acts in Romans 1 does not support the common modern interpretation of the passage. Paul did not deny the existence of a distinction between clean and unclean and even assumed that Jewish Christians would continue to observe the purity code. He refrained, however, from identifying physical impurity with sin or demanding that Gentiles adhere to that code."

L. William Countryman, Professor of New Testament
Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley

"The Hebrew word *'toevah,'* here translated 'abomination,' does not usually signify something intrinsically evil, like rape or theft (discussed elsewhere in Leviticus), but something which is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork or engaging in intercourse during menstruation, both of which are prohibited in these same chapters."

John Boswell, Professor of History
Yale University, New Haven

HELPFUL READING

The following books are highly recommended for those wishing to carefully study issues of homosexuality as related to the Christian Church:

Boswell, John (1980). *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Countryman, L. William (1988). *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Edwards, George R. (1984). *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Furnish, Victor Paul (1979). *The Moral Teaching of Paul*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Horner, Tom (1978). *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

McNeill, John J. (1988). *The Church and the Homosexual*. Boston: Beacon Press. Orig. pub. 1976.

Scanzoni, Letha and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (1978). *Is The Homosexual My Neighbor?* New York: Harper and Row.

Scroggs, Robin (1983). *The New Testament and Homosexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

AN INVITATION

Thousands of lesbians and gay men, along with many friends and family members, have discovered new freedom and deep inner peace in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Their association with Metropolitan Community Church has brought a new measure of fulfillment and meaning to their lives.

Whoever you are, wherever you may be, whatever the circumstances of your life, it is important for you to know that Jesus Christ died to take away your sins, not your sexuality. Christ accepts you as you are, and so do we. You are always welcome at MCC!

LEVITICUS 18:22 & 20:13

Christians today do not follow the rules and rituals described in Leviticus. But some ignore its definitions of their own "uncleanness" while quoting Leviticus to condemn "homosexuals." Such abuse of Scripture distorts the Old Testament meaning and denies a New Testament message.

"You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." These words occur solely in the Holiness Code of Leviticus, a ritual manual for Israel's priests. Their meaning can only be fully appreciated in the historical and cultural context of the ancient Hebrew people. Israel, in a unique place as the chosen people of one God, was to avoid the practices of other peoples and gods.

Hebrew religion, characterized by the revelation of one God, stood in continuous tension with the religion of the surrounding Canaanites who worshipped the multiple gods of fertility cults. Canaanite idol worship, which featured female and male cult prostitution as noted in Deuteronomy 23:17, repeatedly compromised Israel's loyalty to God. The Hebrew word for a male cult prostitute, *qadesh*, is mistranslated "sodomite" in some versions of the Bible.

What is an "Abomination"?

An abomination is that which God found detestable because it was unclean, disloyal, or unjust. Several Hebrew words were so translated, and the one found in Leviticus, *toevah*, is usually associated with idolatry, as in Ezekiel, where it occurs numerous times. Given the strong association of *toevah* with idolatry and the Canaanite religious practice of cult prostitution, the use of *toevah* regarding male same-sex acts in Leviticus calls into question any conclusion that such condemnation also applies to loving, responsible homosexual relationships.

Rituals and rules found in the Old Testament were given to preserve the distinctive characteristics of the religion and culture of Israel. But, as stated in Galatians 3:22–25, Christians are no longer bound by these Jewish laws. By faith we live in Jesus Christ, not in Leviticus. To be sure, ethical concerns apply to all cultures and peoples in every age. Such concerns were ultimately reflected by Jesus Christ, who said nothing about homosexuality, but a great deal about love, justice, mercy and faith.

ROMANS 1:24–27

Most New Testament books, including the four Gospels, are silent on same-sex acts, and Paul is the only author who makes any reference to the subject. The most negative statement by Paul regarding same-sex acts occurs in Romans 1:24–27 where, in the context of a larger argument on the need of all people for the gospel of Jesus Christ, certain homosexual behavior is given as an example of the "uncleanness" of idolatrous Gentiles.

Does this passage refer to *all* homosexual acts, or to *certain* homosexual behavior known to Paul's readers? Romans was written to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, who would have been familiar with the infamous sexual excesses of their contemporaries, especially Roman emperors. They would also have been aware of tensions in the early Church regarding Gentiles and observance of the Jewish laws, as noted in Acts 15 and Paul's letter to the Galatians. Jewish laws in Leviticus mentioned male same-sex acts in the context of idolatry.

What is "Natural"?

Significant to Paul's discussion is the fact that these "unclean" Gentiles exchanged that which was "natural" for them–*physin*, in the Greek text–for something "unnatural," *para physin*. In Romans 11:24, God acts in an "unnatural" way, *para physin*, to accept the Gentiles. "Unnatural" in these passages does not refer to violation of so-called laws of nature, but rather implies action contradicting one's own nature. In view of this, we should observe that it is "unnatural," *para physin*, for a person today with a lesbian or gay sexual orientation to attempt living a heterosexual lifestyle.

Romans 1:26 is the only statement in the Bible with a possible reference to lesbian behavior, although the specific intent of this verse is unclear. Some authors have seen in this passage a reference to women adopting a dominant role in heterosexual relationships. Given the repressive cultural expectations placed on women in Paul's time, such a meaning may be possible.

The homosexual practices cited in Romans 1:24–27 were believed to result from idolatry and are associated with some very serious offenses as noted in Romans 1. Taken in this larger context, it should be obvious that such acts are significantly different from loving, responsible lesbian and gay relationships seen today.

Wade Barton - Grandmother died
384-6298 (Jasper)

HOMOSEXUALITY

what the bible does.. and does not say

HOMOSEXUALITY

What the Bible Does and Does Not Say

How great is our need as individuals for a personal relationship with Christ through the church? We all face challenges of growing as a human being. Gay men and Lesbians face problems peculiar to them because of the attitudes of the society they live in, often including the churches they turn to. For all of us, a firm faith and trust in Christ can be the difference in our total adjustment to life — or lack of it.

If you look for bad things in a person or in an organization, you will probably find them. There undoubtedly are many things wrong with most of the church bodies listed in your Yellow Pages, but there are more things right than wrong. It would be well to remember that the wrong things are not a reflection on Christ or the way Christ wants the church to be, but are the products of the fallible and imperfect human beings who guide these churches. A Christian's personal faith should not depend upon a particular church or clergyperson, but rather it should be solidly based on Jesus Christ.

There may be hypocrites in the churches; that is true. You may have been deeply hurt by a particular priest's or minister's attitude toward homosexuality, but do not judge. Any time you let a hypocrite stand between you and God, the hypocrite is then closer to God than you are.

In addition to the attitude of certain ministers, the Scriptures seem to present a stumbling block for some persons who perceive themselves to be both homosexual and Christian.

Genesis 19:1-28

The story of the destruction of Sodom andGomorrah

This is the Old Testament passage most often used to show that God is displeased with homosexuals. According to many people and churches, these cities were destroyed because people in these cities committed the "sin of

homosexuality." But the Prophet Ezekiel in another inspired book of the Bible tells us that God was displeased with Sodom for a very different reason:

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me (King James: committed idolatry); therefore I removed them when I saw it..... (Ezekiel 16:49-50).

To say that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for homosexuality is to misinterpret the Scriptures. The Bible says God destroyed Sodom because ten righteous people could not be found (Genesis 18:32). The use of the expression "bring these men out to us, that we may know them" is the basis for most of the misinterpretation; yet the Hebrew verb (to know) used here is found 943 times in the Old Testament and in only ten places does it mean sexual intercourse —and each time it refers to heterosexual relations. The people of Sodom broke the law of hospitality to strangers which was so religiously observed in their culture. In every other reference in the Bible (and there are several) the sins condemned are such things as pride and inhospitality. If homosexual behavior was involved in the destruction of Sodom, why didn't the writer use the Hebrew word ahakabh, which actually means homosexuality or bestiality, instead of yadha which means "to know?" Even if the folk of Sodom did make a "homosexual" attack upon the angels, the passage could only serve as a condemnation of rape (certainly an extreme form of inhospitality), and rape is sin under any condition, be it heterosexual or homosexual.

Another Scripture verse that is used to show that the Bible condemns the gay lifestyle is found in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, 18:22, "Thou shalt not lie with a man as thou would with a woman." Anyone who is concerned about this prohibition should read the whole chapter or the whole Book of Leviticus: No pork, no lobster, no shrimp, no oysters, no intercourse during the menstrual period, no rare meats, no eating blood, no inter-breeding of cattle, and a whole host of other laws, including the law to kill all divorced people who remarry.

As Christians, our law is from Christ. St. Paul clearly taught that Christians are no longer under the Old Law (for example in Galatians 3:23-25); that the Old Law is brought to an end in Christ (Romans 10:4); and its fulfillment is in love (Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14).

The New Law of Christ is the Law of Love. Neither Jesus, nor Paul, nor any of the New Testament Scriptures implies that Christians are held to the cultic or ethical laws of the Mosaic Law. It can further be said that the Bible does not record one word spoken by Jesus about homosexuality. Jesus did affirm what it means to be male and what it means to be female. He did deal with human sexuality in an open and non-threatened manner. And He did affirm on the one hand the goodness of marriage, but He also declared marriage (between male and female) is not for all. (Matthew 19:3-12).

As Christians, we believe that the Old Testament is a divinely inspired revelation of God's Old Covenant with God's Chosen People, a relevant study of Hebrew history, and above all the story of the continuing promise of redemption, showing in all ages and in all places God's never ending love for all people.

But when you read the Bible, you must always take into consideration who is speaking, to whom it is addressed, and the purpose for which it was recorded. In order to understand any writing — whether it is the Gettysburg Address or the Bible — it is necessary to understand its context, the circumstances that brought it about, the situation to which it was applied, and the whole cultural background that it came from and was written for. For example, when the Bible says, "increase and multiply," we need to remember, among other things, that this was addressed to Israel, a very small nation surrounded by enemies, and they needed to "multiply" just to survive. Looking at it today, we must not fail to recognize that we are under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ with its cornerstone being the two-fold commandment: LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Secondly, we must keep in mind that the Bible was written in another language (primarily Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament) and was copied and recopied in the original languages, translated and perhaps interpreted by translators and

copyists who were quite capable of human error.

The words used by your personal Bible will depend upon which version or translation you happen to have. There are many English translations of the Bible and each of them uses different English words to translate the passages of the New Testament that people quote to show the sinfulness of homosexuality.

For example, there are two Greek words used in the oft-quoted passages. They are malakos and arsenokoitai. These words are used in several passages by St. Paul. Neither word meant "homosexual" anywhere that Greek was used in the age when Paul wrote. Yet the translators have attached various "homosexual" meanings to these words. Scholars are still trying to agree on just what these words meant to the people Paul wrote them to. There were words in Greek for "homosexual" and for homosexual activity, but Paul did not select these words. (Several books and pamphlets are available which study this more extensively.)

Compare the following three translations of Romans 1:26-27.

King James:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of women, burned in their lust one toward another.

Good News For Modern Man:

Because of what men do, God has given them over to shameful passions. Even the women pervert the natural use of their sex by unnatural acts. In the same way men give up natural sexual relations with women and burn with passion for each other.

J. B. Phillips:

God therefore handed them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged the normal practices of sexual intercourse for something which is abnormal and unnatural. Similarly the men,

turning from natural intercourse with women, were swept into lustful passions for one another.

Which one is closest to what was originally written? Does this passage actually condemn people who are "naturally" or "constitutionally" homosexual? It says you should not indulge in sexual behavior that is unnatural for you. It says heterosexuals should not try to become homosexuals. It says homosexuals should not try to become heterosexuals. It condemns lust, which we know is wrong for heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Father John McNeil, the Catholic scholar, says there is ample evidence that the Biblical authors probably had in mind what we would call perversion, namely, the indulgence in homosexual activity on the part of those who were by nature heterosexually inclined. It is unlikely that the Bible makes any reference at all to the genuine condition of homosexual love. True homosexuals as we know them today were seemingly quite unknown by the writers of the Bible.

Dr. Norman Pittenger, the Anglican scholar says, "For a man or woman whose sexual desire and drive is inevitably towards the same gender, acting in homosexual physical expression is in fact a way of glorifying God and opening the self to the working of the divine love in human affairs."

In Timothy 1:10, the King James version uses the word defile, Good News For Modern Man uses the words sexual perverts and the J. B. Phillips version says sexually uncontrolled or perverted. There are, of course, perversions of a sexual nature, but love certainly is not one of them, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual love.

In Corinthians 6:9, the King James version uses the words abusers of themselves, while Good News For Modern Man uses homosexual perverts and J. B. Phillips uses the pervert. Again, how can this be a condemnation of homosexuality per se? We will agree that there is homosexual perversion just as there is some heterosexual perversion.

In making these observations, we are not attempting to downgrade the Bible, deny its inspiration or its importance in the life of the

Christian. On the contrary, we affirm that the Bible does have a lot to say to us, but that we should hear and learn what it does say, not what people say it says, people who have translated it, people who have interpreted it, people who are capable of making mistakes and building doctrines that the Bible does not teach, but which are believed by others.

Can we actually believe that a Christ who preached love, lived love (with sinners, foreigners, women, outcasts), who gave His life on a cross to show God's love for all people — can we believe a Christ of such love, who recognizes the human need for human love and its physical fulfillment, would require that legions of homosexuals either live a life of celibacy (denying their natural need for intimacy) or face damnation? Not the Christ who died for each of us!

I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to the one that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to that person it is unclean. (Romans 14:14).

Jesus Christ died for our sins, not for our sexuality, to liberate us to a new life of love in God. Neither heterosexual love nor homosexual love is sinful in itself. Sex acts only become sinful when we act in lust or in abuse of another person, abandoning the ways of love. The relationship of two women or two men can be just as loving as a relationship between a woman and a man. Christ died for the sins of both homosexual and heterosexual. Therefore, Gays and Lesbians can come to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and yet still retain their identity and the rightful expression of their sexuality.

How great is our need as individuals for a personal relationship with Christ through the church. The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) was founded as an outreach to the Gay and Lesbian community. It has worshiping congregations across the United States and in many nations around the world. If you would like more information about the Universal Fellowship or about the subject matter of this leaflet, write to: Universal Fellowship Press, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, California 90029.

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HOMOSEXUALITY

not a sin
not a sickness

what the bible
does
&
does not
say

HOMOSEXUALITY & THE CHURCH

The most beautiful word in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "whosoever." All of God's promises are intended for every human being. This includes gay men and lesbians. How tragic it is that the Christian Church has excluded and persecuted people who are homosexual!

We are all created with powerful needs for personal relationships. Our quality of life depends upon the love we share with others, whether family or friends, partners or peers. Yet, lesbians and gay men facing hostile attitudes in society often are denied access to healthy relationships. Jesus Christ calls us to find ultimate meaning in life through a personal relationship with our Creator. This important spiritual union can bring healing and strength to all of our human relationships.

Not a Sin, Not a Sickness

For many centuries, the Christian Church's attitude toward human sexuality was very negative: sex was for procreation, not for pleasure; women and slaves were considered property to be owned by males; and many expressions of heterosexuality, like homosexuality, were considered sinful. Such tradition often continues to influence churches today. Many teach that women should be subordinate to men, continue to permit forms of discrimination against peoples of color, and condemn homosexuals. They say that all homosexual acts are sinful, often referring to their interpretation of scripture.

Other churches today are influenced by a century of psychoanalytic thought promoted through a powerful minority in the field of medicine. They see homosexuality as some kind of sickness. Although this view has now been soundly discredited by the medical profession, some churches and clergy continue to be influenced by the idea. They say that homosexuals are "imperfect" and in need of "healing."

The good news is that, since 1968, when Metropolitan Community Church was founded, the emergence of a strong lesbian and gay community, and the conclusions of new scientific studies on homosexuality have forced the Christian Church to reexamine these issues. A growing number of biblical and theological scholars now recognize that Scripture does not condemn loving, responsible homosexual relationships. Therefore, gay men and lesbians should be accepted–just as they are–in Christian churches, and homosexual relationships should be celebrated and affirmed!

ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Bible is a collection of writings which span more than a thousand years recounting the history of God's relationship with the Hebrew and Christian people. It was written in several languages, embraces many literary forms, and reflects cultures very different from our own. These are important considerations for properly understanding the Bible in its context.

There are vast differences in doctrines between various Christian denominations, all of which use the same Bible. Such differences have led some Christians to claim that other Christians are not really Christians at all! Biblical interpretation and theology differ from church to church.

Biblical interpretation and theology also change from time to time. Approximately 150 years ago in the United States, some Christian teaching held that there was a two-fold moral order: black and white. Whites were thought to be superior to blacks, therefore blacks were to be subservient and slavery was an institution ordained by God. Clergy who supported such an abhorrent idea claimed the authority of the Bible. The conflict over slavery led to divisions which gave birth to some major Christian denominations. These same denominations, of course, do not support slavery today. Did the Bible change? No, their *interpretation* of the Bible did!

New Information Refutes Old Ideas

What influences lead us to new ways of understanding Scripture? New scientific information, social changes, and personal experience are perhaps the greatest forces for change in the way we interpret the Bible and develop our beliefs. Scientific awareness of homosexual orientation did not exist until the nineteenth century.

Most Christian churches, including Metropolitan Community Church, believe the Bible was inspired by God and provides a key source of authority for the Christian faith. Therefore, what the Bible teaches on any subject, including sexuality, is of great significance. The problem, however, is that sometimes the Bible says very little about some subjects; and popular attitudes about those matters are determined much more by other sources, which are then read into the biblical statements. This has been particularly true of homosexuality. But fortunately, recent scholarship refutes many previous assumptions and conclusions.

GENESIS 19:1–25

What was the sin of Sodom? Some "televangelists" carelessly proclaim that God destroyed the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of "homosexuality." Although some theologians have equated the sin of Sodom with homosexuality, a careful look at Scripture corrects such ignorance.

Announcing judgment on these cities in Genesis 18, God sends two angels to Sodom, where Abraham's nephew, Lot, persuades them to stay in his home. Genesis 19 records that "all the people from every quarter" surround Lot's house demanding the release of his visitors so "we might know them." The Hebrew word for "know" in this case, *yadha,* usually means "have thorough knowledge of." It could also express intent to examine the visitors' credentials, or on rare occasions the term implies sexual intercourse. If the latter was the author's intended meaning, it would have been a clear case of attempted gang rape.

Horrified at this gross violation of ancient hospitality rules, Lot attempts to protect the visitors by offering his two daughters to the angry crowd, a morally outrageous act by today's standards. The people of Sodom refuse, so the angels render them blind. Lot and his family are then rescued by the angels as the cities are destroyed.

Several observations are important. First, the judgment on these cities for their wickedness had been announced prior to the alleged homosexual incident. Second, *all* of Sodom's people participated in the assault on Lot's house; in no culture has more than a small minority of the population been homosexual. Third, Lot's offer to release his daughters suggests he knew his neighbors to have heterosexual interests. Fourth, if the issue was sexual, why did God spare Lot, who immediately commits incest with his daughters? Most importantly, why do all the other passages of Scripture referring to this account fail to raise the issue of homosexuality?

What was the Sin of Sodom?

Ezekiel 16:48–50 states it clearly: people of Sodom, like many people today, had abundance of material goods. But they failed to meet the needs of the poor, and they worshipped idols.

The sins of injustice and idolatry plague every generation. We stand under the same judgment if we create false gods or treat others with injustice.

LEVITICUS 18:22 & 20:13

Christians today do not follow the rules and rituals described in Leviticus. But some ignore its definitions of their own "uncleanness" while quoting Leviticus to condemn "homosexuals." Such abuse of Scripture distorts the Old Testament meaning and denies a New Testament message.

"You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." These words occur solely in the Holiness Code of Leviticus, a ritual manual for Israel's priests. Their meaning can only be fully appreciated in the historical and cultural context of the ancient Hebrew people. Israel, in a unique place as the chosen people of one God, was to avoid the practices of other peoples and gods.

Hebrew religion, characterized by the revelation of one God, stood in continuous tension with the religion of the surrounding Canaanites who worshipped the multiple gods of fertility cults. Canaanite idol worship, which featured female and male cult prostitution as noted in Deuteronomy 23:17, repeatedly compromised Israel's loyalty to God. The Hebrew word for a male cult prostitute, *qadesh*, is mistranslated "sodomite" in some versions of the Bible.

What is an "Abomination"?

An abomination is that which God found detestable because it was unclean, disloyal, or unjust. Several Hebrew words were so translated, and the one found in Leviticus, *toevah*, is usually associated with idolatry, as in Ezekiel, where it occurs numerous times. Given the strong association of *toevah* with idolatry and the Canaanite religious practice of cult prostitution, the use of *toevah* regarding male same-sex acts in Leviticus calls into question any conclusion that such condemnation also applies to loving, responsible homosexual relationships.

Rituals and rules found in the Old Testament were given to preserve the distinctive characteristics of the religion and culture of Israel. But, as stated in Galatians 3:22–25, Christians are no longer bound by these Jewish laws. By faith we live in Jesus Christ, not in Leviticus. To be sure, ethical concerns apply to all cultures and peoples in every age. Such concerns were ultimately reflected by Jesus Christ, who said nothing about homosexuality, but a great deal about love, justice, mercy and faith.

ROMANS 1:24–27

Most New Testament books, including the four Gospels, are silent on same-sex acts, and Paul is the only author who makes any reference to the subject. The most negative statement by Paul regarding same-sex acts occurs in Romans 1:24–27 where, in the context of a larger argument on the need of all people for the gospel of Jesus Christ, certain homosexual behavior is given as an example of the "uncleanness" of idolatrous Gentiles.

Does this passage refer to *all* homosexual acts, or to *certain* homosexual behavior known to Paul's readers? Romans was written to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, who would have been familiar with the infamous sexual excesses of their contemporaries, especially Roman emperors. They would also have been aware of tensions in the early Church regarding Gentiles and observance of the Jewish laws, as noted in Acts 15 and Paul's letter to the Galatians. Jewish laws in Leviticus mentioned male same-sex acts in the context of idolatry.

What is "Natural"?

Significant to Paul's discussion is the fact that these "unclean" Gentiles exchanged that which was "natural" for them–*physin*, in the Greek text–for something "unnatural," *para physin*. In Romans 11:24, God acts in an "unnatural" way, *para physin*, to accept the Gentiles. "Unnatural" in these passages does not refer to violation of so-called laws of nature, but rather implies action contradicting one's own nature. In view of this, we should observe that it is "unnatural," *para physin*, for a person today with a lesbian or gay sexual orientation to attempt living a heterosexual lifestyle.

Romans 1:26 is the only statement in the Bible with a possible reference to lesbian behavior, although the specific intent of this verse is unclear. Some authors have seen in this passage a reference to women adopting a dominant role in heterosexual relationships. Given the repressive cultural expectations placed on women in Paul's time, such a meaning may be possible.

The homosexual practices cited in Romans 1:24–27 were believed to result from idolatry and are associated with some very serious offenses as noted in Romans 1. Taken in this larger context, it should be obvious that such acts are significantly different from loving, responsible lesbian and gay relationships seen today.

I CORINTHIANS 6:9 & I TIMOTHY 1:10

Any consideration of New Testament statements on same-sex acts must carefully view the social context of the Greco-Roman culture in which Paul ministered. Prostitution and pederasty (sexual relationships of adult men with boys) were the most commonly known male same-sex acts.

In I Corinthians 6:9, Paul condemns those who are "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind," as translated in the King James version. Unfortunately, some newer translations are worse, rendering these words "homosexuals." Recent scholarship unmasks the homophobia behind such mistranslations. The first word–*malakos*, in the Greek text–which has been translated "effeminate" or "soft," most likely refers to someone who lacks discipline or moral control. The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament but never with reference to sexuality.

The second word, *arsenokoitai*, occurs once each in I Corinthians and I Timothy, but nowhere else in other literature of the period. It is derived from two Greek words, one meaning "males" and the other "beds," a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Other Greek words were commonly used to describe homosexual behavior but do not appear here. The larger context of I Corinthians 6 shows Paul extremely concerned with prostitution, so it is very possible he was referring to male prostitutes. But many experts now attempting to translate these words have reached a simple conclusion: their precise meaning is uncertain.

No Law Against Love

The rarity with which Paul discusses any form of same-sex behavior and the ambiguity in references attributed to him make it extremely unsound to conclude any sure position in the New Testament on homosexuality, especially in the context of loving, responsible relationships. Since any arguments must be made from silence, it is much more reliable to turn to great principles of the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles. *Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. Do not judge others, lest you be judged. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love . . . against such there is no law.*

One thing is abundantly clear, as Paul stated in Galatians 5:14: "the *whole* Law is fulfilled in one statement, '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*'"

OTHER INSIGHTS

"The homosexuality the New Testament opposes is the pederasty of the Greco-Roman culture; the attitudes toward pederasty and, in part, the language used to oppose it are informed by the Jewish background."

Robin Scroggs, Professor of Biblical Theology
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

"One cannot be absolutely certain that the two key words in I Corinthians 6:9 are meant as references to male homosexual behavior."

Victor Paul Furnish, Professor of New Testament
Perkins School of Theology, Dallas

"The strongest New Testament argument against homosexual activity as intrinsically immoral has been derived traditionally from Romans 1:26, where this activity is indicated as *para physin*. The normal English translation for this has been 'against nature.' Two interpretations can be justified concerning what Paul meant by the phrase. It could refer to the individual pagan, who goes beyond his own sexual appetites in order to indulge in new sexual pleasures. The second possibility is that *physis* refers to the 'nature' of the chosen people who were forbidden by Levitical law to have homosexual relations."

John J. McNeill, Adjunct Professor of Psychology
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

"A close reading of Paul's discussion of homosexual acts in Romans 1 does not support the common modern interpretation of the passage. Paul did not deny the existence of a distinction between clean and unclean and even assumed that Jewish Christians would continue to observe the purity code. He refrained, however, from identifying physical impurity with sin or demanding that Gentiles adhere to that code."

L. William Countryman, Professor of New Testament
Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley

"The Hebrew word *'toevah,'* here translated 'abomination,' does not usually signify something intrinsically evil, like rape or theft (discussed elsewhere in Leviticus), but something which is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork or engaging in intercourse during menstruation, both of which are prohibited in these same chapters."

John Boswell, Professor of History
Yale University, New Haven

HELPFUL READING

The following books are highly recommended for those wishing to carefully study issues of homosexuality as related to the Christian Church:

Boswell, John (1980). *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Countryman, L. William (1988). *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Edwards, George R. (1984). *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective.* New York: Pilgrim Press.

Furnish, Victor Paul (1979). *The Moral Teaching of Paul.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Horner, Tom (1978). *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

McNeill, John J. (1988). *The Church and the Homosexual.* Boston: Beacon Press. Orig. pub. 1976.

Scanzoni, Letha and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (1978). *Is The Homosexual My Neighbor?* New York: Harper and Row.

Scroggs, Robin (1983). *The New Testament and Homosexuality.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

AN INVITATION

Thousands of lesbians and gay men, along with many friends and family members, have discovered new freedom and deep inner peace in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Their association with Metropolitan Community Church has brought a new measure of fulfillment and meaning to their lives.

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Christianity and Homosexuality

An issue which seems to be challenging some of the foundations of the Church, and perhaps our society, is the relationship of homosexual persons to the Church. Much of Western culture's homophobia can find its roots in our Judeo-Christian heritage. It is becoming increasingly clear that much of what has long been held as truth is less scriptually and theologically founded than we have believed.

The Bible

For most of Judeo-Christian history, the documents generally known as the Bible have served as the primary guide on most issues. It is an interesting phenomenon that a great number of Christians take literally the references to homosexual acts while interpreting other texts with great flexibility. One person reported listening to a nationally known woman speak in her campaign against homosexuality. She spent much of her time quoting impressively from Leviticus. The listener had accepted much of what the speaker had said until he realized that by Levitical standards, the crusader had herself broken many biblical laws: women speaking in church (I Corinthians 13:34), women teaching men (I Timothy 2:12), wearing a dress made of cotton and polyester (Deuteronomy 22:11), and probably many others of which he was unaware.

What do the scriptures really say? Taken together they say very little. Jesus said nothing at all, which may well be most significant. Considering the relatively small amount of time and attention which the Bible gives to the subject, we must ask ourselves why this is such a volatile issue while other subjects (e.g. judgment, pride, hypocrisy) about which the scriptures say a great deal receive much less passionate attention. On this matter we must examine our own hearts.

Before looking at specific passages, let us note that everyone reads and understands the scriptures in and through the light of what they have been taught. The Bible was not written in a cultural void, and many of its instructions and laws we simply classify as less relevant to us today (e.g. law prohibiting the eating of pork).

Nowhere in the Bible is the idea of persons ***being*** homosexual addressed. The statements are, without exception, directed at certain homosexual acts. It is clear that these early writers had little or no understanding of homosexuality as a psycho-sexual orient-

ation. That truth is a relatively recent discovery. It is crucial here for us to recognize that the Biblical authors were referring to homosexual acts performed by persons they assumed were heterosexuals. (See John S. McNeil, S.J., *The Church and the Homosexual* page 42.)

One of the chief texts for the summary condemnation of homosexuality has been the Sodom and Gomorrah story (Genesis 19:1-29). This story has often been interpreted as showing God's abhorrence of homosexuality. In the story, two angels in the form of men were sent to Sodom to the home of Lot. While they were there, all the men of the city, "both young and old, surrounded the house — everyone without exception," and demanded that the visitors be brought out, "so that we might know them" (verse 5). Lot begged the men to leave his guests alone and take his daughters instead. The men of the city became angry and stormed the door. As a result, they were all struck blind by the angels.

There are several problems with the traditional interpretation of this passage. It should be noted that many scholars do not believe that the verb, "to know" (*yadah*) refers to sexual intercourse. Most likely, it meant that the rowdy, rude crowd insisted on finding out who these strangers really were. Their feelings were based on the fact that Lot was an outsider himself.

Whether or not the intent was sexual, the inhospitality and injustice coming from the mob and generally characterizing the community were "the sin of Sodom" (see Ezekial 16:49-50, Isaiah 13:19, Jeremiah 49:18 & 50:40). Jesus himself refers to the inhospitality of Sodom (Luke 10:10-13). If, indeed, the men were homosexuals, then why would Lot offer them his daughters? It is clear that even if the verb "to know" does refer to sexual intercourse, what is threatened here is rape. The significant point then is that ***all*** rape is considered horrible by God. The story deserves another reading by us all.

It should be noted that all of the men of Sodom could not possibly have been homosexual or there would have been no need to destroy them since they would have eventually all died off with no heirs. Quite likely they were a mixed group of evil men attempting to be abusive to people who were different.

Although the traditional interpretation of the Sodom story fails as an argument against homosexuality, there are several other Old Testament passages which do condemn homosexual acts. Again, it should be noted that these passages do not deal with same-

sex orientation, nor is there any reference to genital love between gay persons. What is clear is that these scriptures are in the context of temple prostitution was an anathema because it involves the worship of other Gods (Deuteronomy 23:17; I Kings 15:12, 14:24, & 22:46).

Of the thousands of Old Testament passages, only two make explicit reference to homosexual acts. Leviticus 18:23 commands: "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman, that is an abomination." And Leviticus 20:13 states that: "If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman, they both commit an abomination. They shall be put to death."

Both of these passages are a part of the Levitical holiness code which is not kept by any Christian group. If it were enforced, almost every Christian would be excommunicated or executed. It has been logically argued that science and progress have made many of the Levitical laws irrelevant for us. For example, Tim LaHaye states that, although Levitical laws prohibit intercourse during menstruation, medical authorities do not view it as harmful; and, therefore, it should not be viewed as sinful. He further explains, "those laws were given 3,500 years ago before showers and baths were convenient, before tampons, disinfectants, and other improved means of sanitation had been invented" (Tim LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage*, page 275). So with that he makes this law irrelevant and rightly so. Ironically, though, in his book, *The Unhappy Gay*, the Levitical law is one of the chief cornerstones. At least let's be honest and consistant. Much of the holiness code is now irrelevant for us as moral law. Thus, the conception of children which was of exceptional importance to the early Hebrews is now made less relevant by overpopulation, just as the prohibition against eating pork and shellfish has been made irrelevant by refrigeration.

The Bible never addresses the issue of homosexual love, but there are several examples of same-sex love. David's love for Jonathan was said to exceed his love for women (II Samuel 1:26 and I Samuel 20:17). Ruth's relationship with Naomi is certainly an example of a deep, bonding love. There is no indication that there was genital expression in either of these. The point is that the scriptures do affirm deep love between persons of the same sex.

In the context of the New Testament there is no record of Jesus having anything to say about homosexuality. This ought to strike us as slightly odd in light of the great threat to Christianity, family life,

and the American way that some preachers would have us believe homosexuality is. Jesus saw religious hypocrisy, bigotry, and hatred as far greater threats to the Kingdom of God. The major New Testament references are to be found in Paul's writings though even there this does not seem to be a very big issue.

Paul's statement in Romans 1:18-32 has been taken as the strongest New Testament rejection of homosexuality. This may not be as clear as generally held. Paul is concerned about the influence of the pagan culture on the Roman Christians — and with good reason. After giving a detailed description of a world that "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator," he continues, "Therefore, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lusts for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty of their perversion."

While Paul in this passage sees homosexual acts as a ***result*** of idolatry, he does not claim that they are the cause of the wrath of God. Idolatry is clearly the issue here. What Paul was most likely referring to was homosexual temple prostitution which was performed by various cults (though far more cults used heterosexual prostitution). Again, Paul is not referring to same-sex love, and he clearly has no concept of persons for whom this lifestyle is "natural."

Before leaving this passage, we should note that this entire section of the letter to the Romans is concerned with showing how all persons are under the power of sin. Keeping the Law cannot save us from our sinful nature. In Romans 2:1, Paul states that people who sit in judgment of others are not better off for "all have sinned . . . "

Paul's other reference to homosexual acts (I Corinthians 6:9-10) is similar to that of the writer of I Timothy 1:8-11 (whom modern scholars often hold is not Paul). Both passages contain lists of persons to be excluded from the Kingdom of God. The interpretation of these passages depends on two Greek words which have always presented a problem for translators. In the King James Version, they are translated "effiminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind." In the Revised Standard Version, they were combined and rendered homosexuals; however, these are not the Greek words for homosexual, so that translation reflects the scholars' bias.

The New International Version illustrates the difference in these two words by translating them "Male prostitute" and "homosexual offenders." The Jerusalem Bible uses the terms "catamites" and "sodomites." Catamites were youth kept especially for sexual purposes; they were usually paid large sums of money. Clearly neither of these passages refer to persons of same-sex orientation, but to people who pervertedly used their sexuality for personal gain.

The final and central message of the New Testament is that *all* persons are loved by God so much that God's Son was sent as a means of redemption from a disease by which we are *all* afflicted. The cure for this disease cannot be found in any set of actions. Neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality is redemptive. God's love through Christ was given to all people.

The Theological Reflection

Christianity grew out of the male-oriented, Jewish system of thought. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees would give thanks that they had not been born a gentile, a dog, or a woman. Since women were of no more value to the Jews than property, and have throughout history had very limited legal or personal rights, it was unthinkable that a man would take what is commonly thought to be a woman's role in a relationship. Dr. George McDonald of the University of North Carolina has demonstrated that persons who are most threatened by the idea of homosexuality are those persons who most strongly insist on sex-role definitions. That is, persons who feel that "women have a respectable place in society and should stay in their place."

Jesus did a great deal to change many social customs and ideas. He elevated the position of women, and they were ultimately His best and most faithful disciples. He did this by example and by commandments which were absolutely inclusive of the rights of all people. Yet, in the name of the Christ whose love encompassed all, the Church has been the most homophobic of all institutions. This should not be surprising when we realize that the Church is still the largest institution which is primarily racially segregated.

If a person still holds that sin is breaking divine rules, then it is easy to see that some rules can be given more importance than others. For people who hold to this legalistic form of Christianity, homo-

sexuality is a transgression of a supreme moral law. We have already seen that this cannot be scripturally justified.

For the Christian, sin must be understood as a disease which results *from* a broken relationship with God and which results *in* a broken relationship with one another and with ourselves. Hence, Jesus' supreme command is to love God and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Christianity is not a religion with new rules and laws, but is rather a new relationship with God. Those things which the legalists are fond of labeling "sins" are actually just symptoms of the much deeper disease of alienation and estrangement. Much of the energy of the Church has been spent dealing with symptoms while leaving the disease intact. Jesus did not seem overly concerned about the legal transgressions of those to whom He ministered. Rather, He was much more concerned with healing the physical, spiritual, emotional, or relational brokenness of people. Perhaps if the Church would again give itself to the healing/reconciling ministry of Jesus, then some of the symptoms about which we are so concerned would begin to disappear.

That brings us to the question: Is homosexuality a symptom of brokenness? In some few cases perhaps so. Yet, obviously pointing fingers of blame and accusation is not Christ's way. Rather, Jesus accepted people as they were and allowed His love and acceptance to work its miracle. However, most gay people have been gay for a long as they can remember. For them, it is as much a natural characteristic as their eye color or their handedness. One would have to be truly insane to make a conscious choice to be gay in our society. Recent Kinsey Institute research (University of Indiana, 1981) has suggested that homosexuality may well be genetic or at least linked to some prenatal factors (*Sexual Preference;* Bell & Weinberg). Certainly most competant psychologists would concur that sexual orientation is set prior to the age of five in most persons. It is, therefore, not a matter of choice, nor is it a moral or ethical issue.

Many Christians insist that God can change/cure the homosexual. In the book, *The Third Sex,* there are six reported cases of homosexuals whom God has "cured." Of these six, at least four are known to have returned to their gay lifestyle (*Christianity Today,* February, 1981). Many gay people spend most of their lives trying, with no success, to persuade God to change them. It is like trying to get God to change

who you are, your eye color, or left-handedness. What option then is left to these persons? They have been told that they can't be gay and be Christians; and since all efforts have failed in their struggle not to be gay, then their only recourse, according to the Church, is that they can't be Christians. So the Church has thrown away as much as 10% of the population.

If they are excluded from the life of the Christian community, who then will tell them of God's inclusive love and of Jesus' reconciling death? Are they left to assume that God is so narrow-minded as to exclude them for something over which they have no control and for a choice they did not make? When will the Church finally be brave enough to say with Paul, "In Christ there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female," gay or straight. God has enough love for all!

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Does God Hate Lesbians and Gays?

Hear Greg Bullard of MCC and Patrick Donohue of the Church of Christ debate issues of **The Bible and Homosexuality.**

The time for condemnation is past. MCC has the message of God's affirming love.

Debate

Monday April 3 7 p.m.

Covenant Metropolitan Community Church
5117 First Ave. North

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL
599-3363

We Say No!

Seder

Margie Miller – Pd
Jerry Watkins – Pd

Carol Cowley
Susan Walker
Pd 10

Bettie Brock – Pd.
Peg Schoettlin – Pd.
D Rannon
Bobby Sabbaugh – Pd.
Mark Brown – Pd.
Mark & Moore Pd

EDDIE MERRELL
ROGER MAYFIELD
> Pd

Dorothy Swims
William Berg
> pd

KATHY WATWOOD
LISA HILYER
CHRIS Gilham
Tyler Gilham
} Pd

BRENDA SEALES Pd

MARK COBB, ADAM, MARY BETH

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Dottie Cook/Trish > pd
LISA S.